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THE HERITAGE OF THE PILGRIMS.

AN ORATION

BY

WILLIAM M. EVARTS.

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THE HERITAGE OF THE PILGRIMS.

AN ORATION

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY

Of the City of New York,

IN CELEBRATION OF THE

TWO HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FOURTH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE LANDING AT PLYMOUTH.

BY

WILLIAM M. EVARTS.

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An Oration

BY

WILLIAM M. EVARTS.

“ QUORUM GLORIÆ NEQUE PROFUIT QUISQUAM LAUDANDO,
NEC VITUPERANDO QUISQUAM NOCUIT.”

ORATION.

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the New England Society :

The custom by which we celebrate this anniversary would find its sufficient support in the sentiment of ancestral veneration. "The glory of the children is their fathers." Of every worthy stock the not degenerate sons cherish the names of those from whom by an authentic lineage they trace their honorable descent. With zealous affection and a pious reverence they explore all sources of knowledge respecting their lives, their characters, their motives, their acts. In a spirit neither arrogant nor envious, they are yet jealous for a just estimate of the virtue and the power which marked the founders of their line; careful that no malign or reckless influence shall distort the record, or obscure the remembrance, of their deeds; earnest in the determination that their latest descendants shall lose nothing of their heritage in these great names, in the

course of its descent. Nor should it be for a moment supposed that the spirit of our institutions and the structure of our society, which have discarded the hereditary transmission of rank and power, discouraged even the succession of wealth, and made ridiculous the culture of a vulgar family pride, have at all weakened or diverted the force of those natural ties which connect us alike with our ancestry and our posterity, and sustain and protect, as a perpetual and imperishable possession, the glory and worth of our forefathers. Say rather that, as you strip from this heritable relation, all that is false or factitious, all that is casual or valueless, you give new force to this genuine lineage of noble character, this true heirship to greatness of purpose and of action. Upon the recurrence of this day, then, although the great transaction which has made it illustrious, had drawn after it no such magnificent train of consequences as history now attributes to it, although the noble undertaking had attained to no proportionate grandeur of result, it would become us to meet with sincere filial devotion, and add one stone to the monument inscribed in honor of the Puritan Exiles, one note to the anthem of their fame.

But the actual course of history has not left the “Landing of the Pilgrims” an isolated or fruitless occurrence, buried in the grave of the past, nor con-

fined its interest to the private and peculiar considerations which should affect the inheritors of their blood and names. It is as the principal and initial in a still continuing series of great events, as the operative and unexhausted cause of large results already transpired, and larger yet surely to ensue, that we chiefly applaud the transaction of this day. Upon the Rock of Plymouth was pressed the first footstep of that energetic and creative power in human affairs which has since overrun the continent, and is stopped in its sublime progress, if it be stopped at all, only with the shores of the all-containing sea. Through the actual aspect of the scene of the debarcation, made up of wintry sea and gloomy sky, and bleak and desolate coast, we see breaking the effulgence of those moral elements of light and hope which have ever since shone with so conspicuous splendor, and the spot seems to us the brightest and the warmest on the face of the earth; *bright*, as the source and fountain of those radiant glories of freedom in whose glad light we live; *warm*, with the fervent glow of that beneficent activity which pervades and invigorates the life of this whole nation, which has secured the progress of the past and forms the hope of the future.

‘ Ille terrarum mihi, præter omnes,
Angulus ridet.’

It is New England, as she was first founded, as she has since been established and built up, as she now is,—mother of men, source of great ideas, nurse of great principles, battle-ground of great conflicts,—that we celebrate in this commemoration.

There is one circumstance in our situation, as assembled here, which cannot escape our attention. We are without the borders of New England, yet no exiles from our country; we are beyond the protection of those governments that still rule over the soil of the Puritan plantations, yet we have neither lost our birthright there, nor are we strangers here; however generous and cordial has been our reception in the community in which we live, yet we have come hither, and here remain, neither by sufferance nor by any title of courtesy or hospitality; we are here *of right* and *at home*. As it is with us in this central metropolis, so is it with our brethren, the descendants of our common ancestors, in the fair cities of the South, and in the wide valley of the West;

“And where the sun, with softer fires,
Looks on the vast Pacific’s sleep;
The children of the Pilgrim sires,
This hallowed day, like us, do keep.”

New England has enlarged the dominion of her laws over no wider territorial limits than at the first,

yet for her expanding population, for her institutions, her customs, her moral, social, political and religious influences, she has received a truly imperial extension. As an integral portion of the great Federal Republic, produced by the double act of Independence and of Union, in which she took so large and decisive a part, New England—losing nothing of her local identity and her express individuality—yet has her chief duties and responsibilities at present and in the future; and in every just estimate of what the vital forces of the Puritan character have hitherto effected, or may yet be expected to accomplish, *this* relation of New England must be largely considered.

While the influences of the occasion direct our view mainly to the past, still our contemplations, as it seems to me, would not wisely take the course either of antiquarian curiosity, or historical research, or controversial attack or vindication. All consultation of the past is vain, unless our questioning find out some key and guide to the future. Man escapes from the unsatisfying present, and lengthens the brief span of his personal existence, by laying hold upon the past, and reaching forward to the future; but of the past only is he secure, and in it he must find the forest and the quarry from which to hew out the shapely structures of the future. It was an

annual custom among the Romans, in the more religious period of their history, as the year approached its close, for the augurs and other high priests to make a solemn observation of the signs, by which they might predict the fortunes of the republic for the coming year. This "*augurium salutis*," this presage of the public welfare, may well attend our pious homage to the memory of those who laid the foundations of our commonwealth, for in these foundations shall we find the surest indications of its future fortunes, propitious or adverse. Nor to ourselves shall a brief communion with the stern natures, the elevated motives, the inspiring example of these remarkable men, be without a *personal* benefit; our feebler spirits and lapsing energies may catch some new vigor from this contact with their embalmed virtue, as of old the dead even was revived by touching the bones of the prophet Elisha.

These reflections seem naturally to present as an appropriate theme, for such consideration as the limits of the occasion will permit, THE HERITAGE OF THE PILGRIMS—*as we have received it from them, as we are to transmit it to our descendants.*

In attempting some analysis of the character, the principles, the conduct of the first settlers of New England, and an estimate of the extent to which they have affected our past, and are to shape our

future, history, I should feel greatly embarrassed, were I not assured that the whole general outline of the subject is already in your minds and memories, that the true spirit and temper for its consideration are included in the disposition which unites you in this celebration. Much more should I feel oppressed, did I for a moment suppose that the interest of the occasion was at all dependent upon any novelty of fact or of illustration, or demanded a brilliant rhetoric or elaborate oratory. I know not what impressions the near examination of the acts and motives of the Puritan emigrants may produce upon others, but to myself their simple grandeur seems to need no aid from vivid coloring or artful exaggeration, nor to incur much peril from imperfect or inadequate conceptions. Resting upon the imperishable basis of real greatness of soul, their fame no praise can brighten and no censure dim.

The seeds of the movement which was to emancipate religion from prelatical control, and re-establish the equality of men before their common Father, were sown in the English mind by Wickliffe. Though their dissemination had not been sufficient greatly to disturb the quiet of the Church or break the peace of the realm, yet when, one hundred and fifty years afterwards, Luther and Zwingli proclaimed, as with a trumpet, the great Reformation, and raised high

the torch of religious liberty, the people of England, from this previous preparation, the more readily accepted the glad tidings, and welcomed the new light. While the pure flames of religious enthusiasm were burning in the hearts of his people, their sovereign, Henry VIII., threw off the Papal dominion upon a question, personal to himself, in which the Pope had proved uncomplaisant to his wishes. He usurped—for, in great measure at least, it was usurpation—the same supremacy in matters of religion which he had wrested from the Pope, and declared himself the head of the English Church, subjected the whole control of its doctrine and discipline to the temporal power, gave to the prelates a new master, but in no degree satisfied the true demand of the movement among his people, freedom of conscience and independency in religion. Preserving still an attachment to the religious tenets of the Church of Rome, he looked with equal disfavor, among his subjects, upon adhesion to the Roman pontiff, and desertion of the Romish faith. The succeeding reigns of his son Edward and his daughter Mary, gave aid and succor, the one to the new religion, the other to the ancient faith; and when Elizabeth, near the middle of the sixteenth century, assumed the crown, she found a people distracted by religious contentions. The singular position taken by King Henry had

tended to divide the realm into three parties,—the Popish recusants, who refused to acquiesce in the royal usurpation of the Pope's spiritual dominion,—the Protestant malcontents, unsatisfied with the rejection of the Pope's temporal authority while so much of the corruption of Popery remained in the ritual and worship,—and the supporters of the Church of England. From the accession of Elizabeth, by education and profession a Protestant, the more zealous reformers counted upon an active coöperation on the part of the Crown in the further emancipation and purification of religion. As matter of personal conviction, the Queen was not so fully weaned from the old faith, but that she retained the crucifix in her own chapel, and attempted its restoration in the churches ; and through her whole reign she refused a legal sanction to the marriage of the clergy. But as matter of state policy and government she early adopted, and steadily pursued, a system still more fatal to the hopes of the party of progress in the church. That great and politic compromise, the Church Establishment, for reasons wise or unwise, she and her statesmen adopted as the true and safe solution of the religious distractions of her people, and *conformity* to its dogmas and its ceremonies, was exacted alike from the sullen Catholic and the ardent Protestant. What till now had been

a war of opinion, and about matters in themselves of much indifference, between the two divisions of Protestants, became a war of persecution by the Government upon the offending faction. For non-conformity, to every degree of disfavor and annoyance, were gradually added the graver punishments of stripes, imprisonment, and death.

The party which contended for a more thorough and complete reformation of religion, and against whom the state-craft of Elizabeth conceived these machinations and executed these oppressions, received from its opponents the name of PURITANS. They were neither sectarian nor schismatical—nor, as yet, dissenters; they were the front of the Protestant host in the still pending warfare with the Church of Rome; in their judgment the main battle of Protestantism in England was not completely won, much less its final triumph assured, and they would hold no truce with the ancient superstition. They would tolerate no defence of the surplice and the cap, of the cross in baptism, or the ring in marriage, on the plea that their retention would conciliate the Papists, and reduce that disaffection. With a large part of the people of England still clinging to the old faith, and much the greater portion of the benefices of the Church filled by dissembling Protestants, ready to “resume their mass-

books with more alacrity than they had laid them aside," the Puritan clergy and laity refused their adhesion to the policy of the Crown, and struggled against conformity. To the strenuousness of their resistance to this specious compromise of the rights of conscience for the peace of the realm, it may well be thought, England owes her safety from relapse into Popery.

The party of the Puritans too, was neither small in numbers nor made up from any one class of society. Strongest in London and other large towns, and among the merchants and tradesmen, during the reign of Elizabeth, it also embraced, according to Hallam, a majority of the Protestant gentry of England, and included not a few eminent nobles. The clergy, below the grade of high ecclesiastics, most famous for talents, learning and eloquence, espoused the cause of progress, and so nearly did they come to a majority of the Convocation of 1562, that a proposition to abolish the offensive usages failed by but a single vote; the records of Parliament throughout the reign of Elizabeth show that the control of the Commons was in the hands of the Puritans. Indeed, things were not far from the condition which they reached in a succeeding reign, when, as Carlyle asserts, "either in conscious act, or in clear tendency, the far greater part of the serious thought

and manhood of England had declared itself Puritan."

The zeal of persecution did not long suffer the controversy to be waged upon mere forms and ceremonies, but transferred the conflict to a battle for the rights of conscience. The inquiries into the just limitations of might and right in spiritual matters, in turn, were directed to civil affairs, and the train of causes was set at work, which at length overthrew the English monarchy and built up this republic in the West.

I have thus far described the relations of the great body of the Puritans to the Reformation and the English Church, but there was gradually developed among them a sect or division which boldly pushed the questions at issue to their ultimate and legitimate solution ; which threw off all connection with the Established Church, rejected alike the surplice and the bishops, the prayer-book and the ceremonies, and, resting upon the Bible, sought no less than to restore the constitution of the Christian Church to the primitive simplicity in which it was first instituted. These Separatists, as they were called, put in practice their theoretical opinions by the formation of churches in which the members were the source of all power and controlled its administration, and, in a word, applied to ecclesiastical

organizations principles which, if introduced into civil government, would produce a pure democracy.

In the “mean townlet of Scrooby,” in Nottinghamshire, recent investigations have accurately ascertained, was collected the Puritan congregation of Separatists, from which proceeded the first settlement of New England. They united themselves in the simple and solemn compact of a church covenant about the year 1602, and found a place of worship, strangely enough, in an Episcopal manor-house belonging to the See of York, but in the tenancy of William Brewster. John Robinson soon became their minister, and for several years they there sustained, as best they might, the persecutions of the civil power, and maintained their worship. This Christian Church, collected from a simple agricultural population in a rude part of England, remote from any great centre of influence, was the seed selected, in the wisdom of Providence, for the plantation of a new community in this Western world. With the formation of this Congregational Church commences the history of New England, for this compacted, organized body, this social unit, made up and fitly framed together in England, and thus as an aggregate and perfect whole, transported to America, made the first settlement at Plymouth.

We at once perceive that we have here before

us the ripened germ, ready to be severed from the parent stock, whence was to proceed the future growth, under the eternal law of development by which seeds produce, each after its kind. As yet this little, this peculiar community, had formed no conscious plan or project looking to the foundation of a new society, much less of an independent state. Yet, whatever of preparatory discipline it was to submit to in the interval, whatever circumstances, as yet uncertain, were to determine where and when it should germinate and be developed, the elements of weakness or of strength, the qualities decisive of the growth which should come from it, if any growth it should have, were fixed and complete. Here, then, is the true point at which to observe what were the important elements and qualities both in the individual characters of these men, and in the solemn and intimate bond of connection that held them together,—in reference, always, to their fitness or unfitness as a vehicle for the transfer of the religion and civilization of the old to the new world, and in reference also to the nature of the institutions of which they were suited to become the founders.

In the first place, these emigrants were drawn from the bosom of the English *people*, in distinction from the court, the nobility, the gentry, the learned professions;—their condition in life was ordinary,

alike removed from the enervation of wealth and the servility of poverty, and having all the independence which belongs to intelligent and laborious industry ;—they were, in the main, a rural and agricultural people, and of the sober, reflective, self-dependent temper which such pursuits cherish ; their condition, as among themselves, was *equal* ; they stood together in their common manhood undistinguished, save only by those differences which intellect, and character, and culture, make among men.

In the second place, they had all the instruction and experience in personal rights and their enjoyment, which even at that day distinguished the condition of Englishmen, and, outside of any special pressure of the Government in particular matters of state or church policy, were a large and valuable possession to the people of England. They might be oppressed by cruel, unjust or impious *laws*, but had important and, in general, efficient guaranties against oppression in violation of law. A common law, being nothing else than the adaptation of the immutable principles of general justice and common right to the ever-varying circumstances of human affairs, the public administration of justice, a participation as jurors in such administration, security by the *habeas corpus* against illegal restraint, an invio-

lable threshold, and a representation in the Commons which controlled the supplies,—these were some of the rights of Englishmen in which the Puritan emigrants possessed a share.

But the traits which most command our attention, both from intrinsic dignity and the absorbing influence on their conduct, are the depth of their religious convictions, the purity of their religious sentiments, and the fervor of their Christian faith. If our Puritan forefathers in civil station and worldly estate ranked among the common people of England, the disdain of courtiers and the scorn of prelates, they seemed to themselves children of a nobler lineage, and consecrated of an elder priesthood than those who despised them. To them religion and *its* laws of worth and dignity were not only realities, but the sole realities ; Christianity was not only true, but its spirit and its precepts were the all-sufficient guide and rule of life ; God they not only revered, with a distant awe, as the Creator of the world and the Ruler of events, but in the boldness of a filial adoption confided in him as the Father of their spirits, the watchful Protector of their daily walk ; wealth in earthly possessions, power in temporal sway, they counted as nothing beside the riches and the glories of the spiritual kingdom ; the pride of life, the pleasures of sense, all pomp and magnificence

seemed but dust and ashes to the substantial joys and effulgent splendors of the spiritual life. Not less was the indifference to the toils and hardships, the sufferings, privations and afflictions of the present time, begotten by the high hopes and sure rewards of their vivid faith. The enemies that they dreaded were the enemies of their souls, the encounters to them most formidable were with the great adversary, the evils they feared were the frailty and the wickedness of their own natures, the victories they aimed at were over temptation and sin, the conquest they strove for was over their own spirits.

In an age when faith has grown colder, when religion is much less a matter of public and general thought, when outward and ostensible enterprises for the moral and spiritual advancement of man attract and absorb whatever activity is spared from purely worldly pursuits, these elevations of spirit seem, to many, inconsistent with the calm and sober performance of duty which marked the conduct of these men. Some stigmatize them as the vagaries of a vulgar fanaticism, others pardon them as the extravagancies of a generous enthusiasm, but *we* acknowledge them as an essential element in the agencies which were to operate great social and political revolutions at home, and found and build up a great nation abroad.

Passing from this brief and imperfect examination of the character of these emigrants themselves, mark now the peculiar association in which they were united, and in which they were to leave their native land and ultimately to seek these shores. It was an independent, isolated, Christian Church, part of no establishment, subordinate to no hierarchy, and having no relations outside of itself. I propose no observations, mystical or ecclesiastical, concerning it as a *church*, but simply a consideration of the principles on which its formation as a *social unit* rested, and in reference to its convertibility, when need should be, into an independent community and complete body politic.

And first we notice that this community was organized, as its fundamental discrimination from the system of prelacy, upon the notion that the members were the source and depository of all power, that by their election all offices were to be filled, and that the suffrage was equal and universal.

We next observe that the tie which bound the members together had no reference to selfish interests or the pursuit of gain, but was that of brotherhood, and for the culture of their higher nature and the promotion of their supreme welfare. Mutual support and aid, counsel, sympathy, a bearing of each other's burdens, a participation in each other's

joys and sorrows, conflicts and triumphs, were the right and the duty of each in respect to all.

Add to this, that this union was permanent, that it embraced the family as well as the individual ; that it presupposed concert and consent as to the objects and ends of life ; that it ever confirmed and constantly cherished unity of purpose ; that it involved a thorough acquaintance with each by all in the most sincere and intimate sense ; and that around all was thrown the solemn sanction of divine authority, and you have a little community with more of the true social spirit to hold it together, and less chance or scope for the operation of selfish discords to weaken or dissolve it, than ever has been, or ever can be, otherwise constituted.

To this Puritan congregation the cruel alternative was soon presented, between expatriation and abandonment of their religious worship ; for to this pitch had the civil power pushed its persecutions. They chose to turn their backs upon their homes and their possessions, and, to use their own language, “by joint consent they resolved to go to the low countries, where they heard was freedom of religion to all men.” For twelve years, in patient, though ungrateful toil, in occupations unfamiliar and uncongenial, amid a crowded population, speaking a foreign tongue, and with customs strange to their English

notions, they led an honest life and maintained their religious worship. They have left a record of the reasons and the influences which induced them to leave Holland and seek the remote, unpeopled wilderness within the nominal sovereignty of England. It is quite apparent from a perusal of their own statements, that on leaving England they had no other view than a peaceable life with the enjoyment of religious liberty, looking no further; that as they advanced in years and their children grew up around them, the probable fortunes of their posterity were forced upon their attention. They foresaw that their individuality and nationality, their language, the very religion which was dearer than life or country to them, would be swallowed up in the general population of Holland. For themselves, they would have cared little whether their short sojourn before they were removed to "heaven, their dearest country," were in one place or another; but for their children and later posterity they desired the birthright of Englishmen, and for the pure and primitive forms of Christianity which they possessed, and at so costly sacrifice had preserved, they sought a permanent establishment and a wider diffusion.

Under these impulses, led by these motives, to enjoy liberty of conscience and pure scriptural worship, to enlarge his majesty's dominions and advance

the kingdom of Christ ; or, in other words, to found a new society where the Christian religion and English law should prevail, religious liberty flourish and a pure faith be preserved, our Pilgrim fathers projected and accomplished the perilous passage of the wide ocean, braved the unknown dangers of a wilderness, and on this day, two hundred and thirty-four years ago, landed on the Rock of Plymouth. Thus did they, with a true filial devotion, cling to the skirts of the ungracious mother from whose bosom they had been so rudely repelled, and thus did the stone, which the builders of English liberty, and English law, and English power, rejected, become the head of the corner of our constituted state.

Well might Milton, the brightest star in the firmament of English, no less than of Puritan, literature, mourn the great loss to England from this emigration, led by the Pilgrims, and closely followed by so much of the worth and strength of the nation, and sadly forebode for the fortunes of the parent state thus bereaved. “ What numbers of faithful and free-born Englishmen and good Christians have been constrained to forsake their dearest home, their friends and kindred, whom nothing but the wide ocean and the savage deserts of America could hide and shelter from the fury of the bishops. Oh, if we

could but see the shape of our dear mother England, as poets are wont to give a personal form to what they please, how would she appear, think ye, but in a mourning weed, with ashes upon her head, and tears abundantly flowing from her eyes, to behold so many of her children exposed at once, and thrust from things of dearest necessity, because their conscience could not assent to things which the bishops thought indifferent? Let the astrologers be dismayed at the portentous blaze of comets and impressions in the air, as foretelling troubles and changes to states; I shall believe there cannot be a more ill-boding sign to a nation (God turn the omen from us!) than when the inhabitants, to avoid insufferable grievances at home, are enforced by heaps to leave their native country."

It has been the custom of poets, of orators, and of historians, as they looked upon this little fragment of population,—torn from the bosom of a powerful state, driven from the shelter of established law, outcast from the civilization of the world, thrust, as it were, unarmed and naked into a fierce struggle with rigorous, inexorable nature,—to pity its weakness, deplore its trials, and despair of its fate. If the view be confined to the mere outward aspect of the scene and the actors, if you omit their real history and overlook their actual character and connec-

tion, if you would regard them as a casual group thrown on the shore from the jaws of shipwreck, or from some dire social convulsion, the picture of feebleness, of misery, of hopelessness, can scarcely be exaggerated.

But, unless my analysis of their character and deduction of their history has wholly failed of its purpose, we cannot resist the conviction that, as the beginning of a new community, as the foundation of an original and separate civil society, as the germ and nucleus of an independent political state, this band of first settlers included as many elements and guaranties of strength, of safety, and of growth, as lay within the whole resources of human nature, or could be added from the supports of a divine religion.

All the traits and qualities of personal manhood, and in as large measure as, before or since, their countrymen or ours have attained to, they possessed ; the attendance of their wives and children carried into whatever strange wilderness a present home, and stamped the settlement as permanent, not fugitive ; they were equipped with all the weaponry of substantial education, furnished with sufficient stores of ordinary learning, trained in a discipline of practical experience, better than proof armor in the warfare they were to wage.

Nor was the preparation of their spirits for the great undertaking less fit and sufficient. As they did not fear death, no terror could frighten them from their purpose; as they did not love pleasure, no present privations could appall them, no sensual attractions allure them back; as they were but as wayfarers upon the earth, with no abiding-place, pursuing only the path of duty, wherever they pitched their moving tent, each setting sun would find them "a day's march nearer home."

As the love of gain, the wild spirit of adventure, the lust of dominion, had no share in bringing them across the seas, so no disappointments or discontents of a selfish nature could enfeeble, distract, dissolve their union; as the bonds of their confederacy were spiritual and immortal, no natural afflictions or temporal disasters could absolve the reciprocal duty, or break the mutual faith, in which they were knit together as the soul of one man.

Esteeming, as we must, that our Pilgrim ancestors brought to these shores whatever of essential strength there was in the civilization which they left, and whatever of power there is in a living Christian faith,—that their coming was absolutely void of all guileful purpose, and their association vital in every part with true social energy, we may well consider the laments at the feebleness, and distrusts

of the issue, of their enterprise, as more fanciful than philosophical.

What, then, though their numbers were few and their persons ordinary ; what though the dark frown of winter hung over the scene, and the sad cry of the sorrowing sea-birds, and the perpetual moan of the vexed ocean, breathed around them ; what though the deeper shadow of death, the sadder wail of the dying and the bereaved were in their midst ; what though want had possession of their camp, and starvation threatened at their outposts ? Strong in human patience, fortitude, courage to bear or to remedy whatever it was in human nature to endure, or in human power to cure, and for the rest, mightier still in the supports of their sublime faith, with the prophet's fervor, each one of them could exclaim, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines ; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat ; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls : yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

Equally propitious to the beneficent character of the institutions they were to build up was it, that, while they brought with them such amazing elements of vigor and freedom, they left behind them almost all that had deformed and burdened the de-

velopment of the state, and all the incrustations and corruptions that had overlaid the Church and defiled religion. King, nobles, gentry, all fixed ranks, all prerogatives, all condescensions, all servilities, they were for ever, in a social sense, delivered from ; the whole hierarchy, bishops and priests, canons and convocations, courts ecclesiastical and high commissions, rites and ceremonies, were at once thrown off and utterly ignored ; all that could assist, confirm, enlarge and liberalize society, they brought with them, unembarrassed with aught that could thwart, trammel or impede its advancement.

That before the emigrants left Holland, they designed to become a body politic, using among themselves civil government, and choosing their own magistrates ; that in preparation for their landing they made a formal compact or covenant to that end, and that, without break or interval from that moment, they and their descendants, to this hour, have maintained free government (notwithstanding it was so long colonial and dependent) ; that from the same stock their numbers were supplied and increased, and that from the same stock and under the same lead and impulses, the Massachusetts colony was founded ; that the Connecticut and New Haven colonies sprung from their loins, while that of Rhode Island grew out of their intolerance ; and, in fine,

that all New England, as it has been and is, grew up, as naturally as the oak from the acorn, from this seed planted at Plymouth, I need only to suggest.

The institutions founded by the fathers of New England were new in the affairs of men, and greatly in advance of whatever past experience had shown possible in human condition ; the civil prudence of their age regarded them but as the experiments of the model and the laboratory, successful only by exclusion of the friction and disturbance of great and various interests, and by shelter from the stormy elements nursed in the bosom of every large society ; the cold eye of tyranny yet watches for the hour when the heats of passion shall dissolve, or the frosts of selfishness shall crumble their whole fabric ; still, their foundations stand sure, and their dome ascends and widens in ampler and ampler circles.

But the *spirit of liberty* is no new impulse in human conduct, no new agent in the history of states and nations ; yet *it* is generally regarded as the main impulse in the action of our forefathers, which is without a parallel,—as the effective agent in their constructive achievement, which is without a precedent.

The truth is, with our Pilgrim fathers liberty never was valued as an end, though as a means to *duty* it was worthier than all other possessions, and

dearer than life itself. Emancipation from existing authority they sought only to subject themselves to a more thorough discipline; loyalty to a ruler they replaced by obedience to law; they threw off the yoke of their king only to pursue the stricter service of their God. They cherished, they cultivated, they sheltered, they defended, they watered with their tears and with their blood, the fair flower of liberty, but only that they might feed upon its sober, sometimes its bitter, fruit, *duty*.

The mere passion for liberty has overthrown many dynasties and torn in pieces many communities; it has an immense energy to upset and destroy; but here its work ends, unless it be attended by a sound conception and faithful acceptance of the grand constructive ideas of law and duty, to hold up the tottering, or to rebuild the ruined, state. We pronounce, then, that the highest fidelity to law, and the sincerest devotion to duty, were the controlling sentiments of our ancestors in their walk and work.

Nor did our Puritan fathers teach, either by lesson or example, that *all* men are capable of political self-government. Their doctrine and their practice alike reject such folly, and give this as the demonstration and the truth, that men capable of governing themselves as men, are able to maintain a free civil state as citizens. While they knew that a

strong people neither need, nor will endure, a strong government, they no less knew that strength must be somewhere, in people or government, to hold any political society together, and their practical politics were directed by this conviction.

Nor was *equality of right* in the citizens relied on as an adequate social principle to preserve the peace, and advance and develope the power of the commonwealth. That, both from their actual temporal condition, and from their religious opinions, equality of right would be, in its just sense, recognized and acted upon, was inevitable. But equality of right, standing alone, is a principle eminently dis-social, and paralyzing to all high and worthy progress of the general welfare. It may answer for a band of robbers to divide their spoils by, or victorious barons to apportion the conquered land. But join with equality of right, as did the first planters of New England, community of interest and reciprocity of duty, as the controlling sentiments, and you infuse a genuine public spirit, and evolve a strenuous social activity, which will never weary and never fail ; you produce, indeed, the efficient causes and influences which have animated and directed the immense expansion of American society, the actual development of American character.

It is worth our while to observe, from the very

earliest documents of the emigration and settlement, how well the necessity and the grounds of a true public spirit were understood, and how earnestly they were insisted on. In their letter from Leyden to the Virginia Company, Robinson and Brewster thus recite one of the grounds of just expectation for the success of the projected community. “We are knit together as a body in a more strict and sacred bond and covenant of the Lord, of the violation whereof we make great conscience; and by virtue whereof we do hold ourselves *straitly tied to all care of each other's good, and of the whole by every, and so mutual.*” In his parting letter upon the embarkation Robinson enjoins, “a thing there is carefully to be provided for, to wit, that with your common employments you join common affections, truly bent upon the general good; avoiding, as a deadly plague of your both common and special comfort, *all retiredness of mind for proper advantage*, and all singularly affected any manner of way. Let every man repress in himself and the whole body in each person, as so many rebels against the common good, all private respects of men's selves, not sorting with the general conveniency.” And thus Cushman exhorts the whole society, just a year after the landing: “Now, brethren, I pray you remember yourselves, and know that you are not in a retired mo-

nastical course, but have given your names and promises one to another and covenanted here to cleave together in the service of God and the king. What then must you do ? May you live as retired hermits and look after nobody ? Nay, you must seek still the wealth of one another, and inquire as David, How liveth such a man ? how is he clad ? how is he fed ? He is my brother, my associate ; we ventured our lives together here and had a hard brunt of it ; and we are in league together. Is his labor harder than mine ? Surely I will ease him. Hath he no bed to lie on ? Why, I have two ; I'll lend him one. Hath he no apparel ? Why, I have two suits ; I will give him one of them. Eats he coarse fare, bread and water, and I have better ? Why, surely we will part stakes. He is as good a man as I, and we are bound to each other ; so that his wants must be my wants, his sorrows my sorrows, his sickness my sickness, and his welfare my welfare ; for I am as he is. And such a sweet sympathy were excellent, comfortable, yea, heavenly, and *is the only maker and conserver of churches and commonwealths* ; and where this is wanting ruin comes on quickly." Such was their temper, such their intelligence, such their wisdom. So long as such sentiments pervade a community, it will feel no lack of public spirit, suffer no decay of public virtue.

Add to these principles, what is not so much a separate principle as a comprehensive truth, lying at the bottom of the whole enterprise, that the state and the church were made for man, and not man for the government and the priest—that the culture and development of the individual members of society, and not the grandeur or glory of the body politic, were the superior and controlling objects—and that such culture and development should be religious and for the immortal life, and you have all the constituent elements and forces included in The Puritan Commonwealth.

And they were ample and adequate, and thus far have been so proved; for the days of small things and for the most magnificent expansion; for all the shocks and dangers that have beset the feeble plantations, the growing colonies, the heroic confederation, the united people. Nor has as yet appeared any inherent defect, or incongruous working in the system, which demands or threatens change. Radicalism cannot dig below its foundations, for it rests upon the deepest principles of our nature; philanthropy can build out no wider, for it recognizes the brotherhood of all men; enthusiasm can mount no higher, for it rises to the very threshold of heaven. No further strength or firmer stability can be added to it, for faith among men, “which holds the moral

elements of the world together," and faith in God, which binds that world to his throne, give it its cohesion and its poise.

Some question has been made, where the Puritan emigrants learned, and whence they derived, the great thoughts of equality and freedom, so far in advance of the English liberty of that day, or even the present, so much deeper, and purer, and nobler, than any then existing civilization could have supplied. One of your own orators* has thought to trace the inspiration, through the religious exiles of Queen Mary's reign, who found at Geneva "a state without a king and a church without a bishop," "backwards from Switzerland to its native land of Greece;" as if unwilling that the bright flame of his country's freedom should be elsewhere lighted, than at those same undying Grecian fires which have kindled the splendors of his own eloquence. I, rather, find the source of these divine impulses in the Christian Scriptures, whence so much else of the Puritan character drew its nourishment, and which they consulted ever, as an oracle, with wrestling and with prayer. I seem to see in the mature designs of Him, to whom a thousand years are but as one day, who moves in his own appointed times, and selects and prepares his own instruments, the re-enactment of the first

* Mr. Choate's Oration, 1843.

scenes of the Christian dispensation, in the establishment of the Christian faith upon this unpeopled continent—with this new demonstration and this new power of its vital energy, as well for the reconstruction of all human institutions as for the regeneration of the soul—and hail the Pilgrim fathers as the bearers of a new commission, than which there has been none greater since the time of the Apostles.

Time, and your patience, fail me to insist upon the penetrating forecast and wide sagacity, the vast civil prudence and exhaustless fidelity with which our forefathers sought, upon these foundations, to rear a fabric of liberty and law, civilization and religion, for a habitation to their posterity to the latest generation. Yet I must observe that *all their care* was applied directly to the people at large, to the preservation and perpetuation of intelligence, virtue and piety among them; assured that, from this support, good government and free government were of as certain growth in the moral constitution of things, as is the natural harvest from seed well sown in a grateful soil. Accordingly, they founded a system of common education, not expecting to make the whole people learned, but to make them intelligent, and so protect them from that oppression which knowledge can practise upon ignorance; they maintained the public administration of justice, and con-

fined it to the common law system and procedure, not anticipating that each citizen would become as profound, or as erudite in his special science, as my Lord Coke, but intending that common right and practical justice should be subserved, and not defrauded, by all the profundity and erudition in the world ; they employed the holy Sabbath, and gave it full measure in the division of the week, in public preaching, exhortation and prayer ; not as a ceremonial expiation or a servile propitiation for the sins of the people, but for instruction to their understandings and confirmation of their faith ; and above all, the Bible, the Bible in the family, the Bible in the school, the Bible in the church, was kept ever under the eyes and in the ears and in the hearts of the people, in childhood, in manhood, and in age ; for Pope, Prelate and Puritan alike agreed that this book contained the oracles of their religion, and our forefathers knew, by impressive experience, that whichever, Pope, Prelate or People had the keeping of these oracles, held the keys of religious, civil and social liberty.

How, from these never-failing springs, for every occasion of the advancing communities, both civic virtue and martial spirit were supplied ; how as early as 1643 the four New England colonies framed articles of confederation, which are the type of the

general confederation of the Revolution and of the Federal Union; how in the Indian wars and the French campaigns, the warlike vigor of the people was developed and disciplined; how in the heroic toils and sacrifices of the war of Independence, and in the wise counsels and generous conciliations which made us a united people, New England bore an unmeasured, an unstinted share; how on the tide of her swelling population these traits of her founders have been diffused and the seeds of their institutions disseminated, why should I relate? They are the study of yourselves and of your children.

Behold now in these,—in the great fame of the Puritan exiles, in their sublime pilgrimage, in the society they founded, in the States they built up, in the liberty and the law, in the religion and the civilization they established,—behold our HERITAGE from them. I have made no mention of the immense territory which our country's bounds include, but I have shown you the price at which it was all purchased, the title by which it is all held; I have not counted the heaped up treasures of your wealth, but I have pointed you to the mine whence it was all digged, to the fires by which it has all been refined; I have not followed the frequent sails of your commerce over the universal sea, but I have shown you, in the little Mayflower, the forerunner of your in-

numerable fleet ; I have not pictured the great temple, which from generation to generation has been raised, the home of justice, the habitation of freedom, the shrine towards which the hopes of all nations tend, but I have explored its foundations and laid bare its corner-stone. This vast material aggrandizement, this imperial height of position, we may exult in, but they do not distinguish us from earlier, and now ruined, states ; they form no part of our peculiar inheritance. Green grass has grown beneath the tread of other nations, and for them the vine has dropped its purple vintage, and the fields turned up their golden harvest ; nature has crowned them with every gift of plenty, and labor gained for them overflowing wealth ; uncounted population has filled their borders, victorious arms pushed on their limits, and glorious art, and noble literature, and a splendid worship spread over all, their graces and their dignities ; but justice among men, the main policy of all civil society, and faith in God, its only guaranty of permanence, were wanting or died out, and they were turned under by the ploughshare of Time to feed a nobler growth.

As we value this heritage which we have thus received, as we are penetrated with wonder and gratitude at the costly sacrifices and heroic labors of

our ancestors, by which it has been acquired for us ; as in each preceding generation we observe no unworthy defection from the original stock, no waste of the rich possession, but ever its jealous protection, its generous increase, so do we feel an immeasurable obligation to transmit this heritage unimpaired, and yet ampler, to our posterity, to maintain unbroken the worth and honor which hitherto have marked their lineage. This obligation can only be fulfilled by imitating the wisdom of our fathers, by observing the maxims of their policy, studying the true spirit of their institutions, and acting, in our day, and in our circumstances, with the same devotion to principle, the same fidelity to duty. If we neglect this, if we run wild in the enjoyment of the great inheritance, if we grow arrogant in our prosperity, and cruel in our power, if we come to confound freedom *in* religion with freedom *from* religion, and independence *by* law with independence *of* law, if we substitute for a public spirit a respect to private advantage, if we run from all civil duties, and desert all social obligations, if we make our highest conservatism the taking care of ourselves, our shame and our disaster will alike be signal.

Nor, if we will rightly consider the aspect of our times, and justly estimate the great conflicting social forces at work in the nation, shall we lack for noble

incentives to follow in the bright pathway of duty in which our fathers led, nor for great objects to aim at and accomplish. While we rejoice that from no peculiar institutions of New England does occasion of discontent or disquietude arise, to vex the public conscience, or disturb the public serenity; that the evils and dangers of ignorance and sloth are imbedded in no masses of her population, local or derivative; that not for her children are borne our heavy burdens of pauperism and crime; let us no less rejoice that, clogged by no impediment and exhausted by no feebleness of her own, *all* the energies of New England may be devoted to succor and sustain at every point of weakness, *all* her power to uphold, and confirm every element of strength, in whatever region of our common country, in whatever portion of her various population.

Guided by the same high motives, imbued with the same deep wisdom, warmed with the same faithful spirit as were our ancestors, what social evil is there so great as shall withstand us, what public peril so dark as shall dismay us? Men born in the lifetime of Mary Allerton, the last survivor of the Mayflower's company, lived through the Revolution; men born before the Revolution still live. Of the hundred and one persons who landed from the Mayflower, one half were buried by early spring;

yet now the blood of the New England Puritans beats in the hearts of more than seven millions of our countrymen. The slow and narrow influences of personal example and of public speech, by which alone, in the days of the early settlement, were all social impressions made and diffused, are now replaced by a thousand rapid agencies by which public opinion is formed and circulated. Population seems no longer local and stationary, but ever more and more migratory, intermingled and transfused ; and, if the virtue and the power, to which to-day we pay our homage, survive in the sons of the Pilgrims, doubt not their influences will soon penetrate and pervade the whole general mass of society throughout the nation ; fear not but that *equality of right, community of interest, reciprocity of duty* will bind this whole people together in a perfect, a perpetual union.

